

## Providing Emergency Services for Veterans

Written by Mike Honda  
Thursday, 17 January 2008 19:00

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Imagine the horror a veteran feels after leaving a hospital emergency room only to learn that they owe thousands of dollars in medical bills, an expense they believed was covered under the veterans' health insurance program available to those who have served in our nation's armed forces. For several years now, I have heard from veterans in our district that the VA is inadequately providing reimbursement for emergency health services distributed at a non VA hospital.

To fix this, I introduced H.R. 4146, a bill that will clarify current law to close a loophole and ensure that the VA covers veterans' emergency health care costs—before and after stabilization—if no VA hospital bed is available at a geographically accessible VA facility. At the moment, emergency health care for many veterans is not being covered when they go to non-VA hospitals, even when the closest VA hospital might be hundreds of miles away. My bill would prevent veterans from falling into financial disaster just because they were injured in an area not served by the VA, and will save our vets a great deal of grief.

This week I had the opportunity to testify before the House Committee on Veterans Affairs' [Subcommittee on Health](#), which held a [hearing](#) on several pieces of important veterans' legislation, including my bill.

Major veteran service organizations recognize the need for this legislation, as they testified during the hearing. [The American Legion](#), [Veterans of Foreign Wars](#) and [Vietnam Veterans of America](#) (VVA) gave their full support of the bill, with VVA noting that "it just makes sense."

The Veterans Administration also testified that they generally supported my bill, as well as a similar bill introduced by Rep. Zack Space, [H.R. 3819](#). I look forward to working with the Committee and with the VA to ensure that this problem is ameliorated, and our veterans have one less worry during an emergency situation.

## Now More Than Ever

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue unabated, with the number of returning veterans growing rapidly. These young men and women return home and deserve to be treated with the

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utmost respect for their service to our country.

According to the [Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America](#) , more than 1.5 million American troops have served in Iraq or Afghanistan, and thousands have been deployed multiple times. These veterans and their families face unique challenges, and being faced with emergency health care bills due to a problem in current law should not be one of them.

I feel a strong obligation to honor these men and women by doing my part, as a legislator, to see that the law treats these returning men and women with dignity, and I will continue to do my part to advocate for fair veterans' reimbursement policies.